

IG Allows Organizations to Embrace Information as an Asset

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By Angela C. Kennedy, EdD, MBA, RHIA

AS AN EDUCATOR, I often find myself answering the question: “What is health information management?” As information continues its rise as a critical asset for providers, this question has become easier to answer. As data policies based on the value of information become standard, HIM professionals can simply state, “I govern healthcare data and the information derived from it.”

While some HIM professionals may also find themselves in charge of governing financial and administrative data, for the most part the bulk of HIM work concerns the governance of healthcare data and information. The need for information that you can trust has been the driving force behind our profession for decades. Our role is critical to the mission of the “Triple Aim”: reducing cost, providing better care, and improving population health. Those goals cannot and will not be realized without trusted health information.

At the end of August news broke that a large US hospital network was hacked and approximately 4.5 million records were stolen. While the hackers did not gain access to personal health information, they did gain access to demographic and identity information that placed affected individuals at risk for identity theft. Information is bought and sold for different purposes every day. Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, a patient can sue for negligence when personal identity is breached. Successful data stewardship is of paramount importance as the need to control and secure access to patient information is heightened. Security breaches, e-discovery sanctions, and compliance penalties support the growing demand for information governance.

Models of healthcare are changing and the need for trusted information, used to drive agility and support key business decisions, is a top priority. Technological advancements are credited as the primary driving force behind the information explosion. In 2012, 500 petabytes of data were collected electronically. That’s equivalent to 10 billion four-drawer filing cabinets of data. Reactive approaches to data management are not acceptable when managing healthcare data. The integrity and accessibility of healthcare data have a direct impact on patient care and safety.

The pressure is on for healthcare organizations to get control of healthcare data in an optimal way and move their respective organizations forward. Sustainable benefits can be derived across the healthcare ecosystem when organizations commit to the principles of information governance. Information governance requires the adoption of core principles, a framework, and rules that support a proactive approach to information management. These principles are applied to all data types across the enterprise. This infocentric approach helps to create a culture within the organization that values information.

The time is now for information governance in healthcare. I challenge you to assess the maturity of information governance for your organization. Apply and refine information governance principles as appropriate and reap the benefits of embracing information as an asset.

In addition, I challenge you to dream big, believe, and LEAD information governance initiatives across the healthcare ecosystem.

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